



# A ROAD MAP FOR All Things Assessment



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# Introduction



The purpose of this guide is to help families understand assessments their students participate in. It includes what questions to ask, how to help children prepare, and the required components of each assessment. As families try to understand the many assessments required by school districts and the state department of education, it is also important for them to know what is required and what they can do to help. Mississippi Code 37-16-3 requires that all students enrolled in public school participate in the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System. By understanding various types and uses of assessment, parents and families are prepared to ask questions that support their child during testing.

The formal assessment process can often be overwhelming. This guide explains assessments so that parents and families understand and can use the results to improve services and interventions for their students. Furthermore, this guide provides information about

specific assessments students may take through various stages of development.

Assessments are often complex and time-consuming. Both the process and results can be stressful if not properly understood. When parents and families understand the purpose, as well as the strengths and opportunities of the different assessments, they are better able to support and advocate for their student.

It is critical that students be assessed at various developmental stages to: (1) measure progress, (2) tailor educational programs, and (3) determine eligibility for any additional needed supports. It is the hope of the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) that parents and families find this guide to be a valuable source of information that empowers them with timely and quality information. For more information, contact the [MDE Office of Special Education](#) at 601.359.3498 or the [MDE Office of Student Assessment](#) at 601.359.3052.

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# Part 1: Defining Assessment

## What is Assessment?

Assessment is a process used to determine a student's strengths and opportunities in multiple areas or types of abilities. There are multiple assessment instruments and methods designed to measure those different things. Assessments provide information about a student in areas such as:



- Specific problem areas/deficits
- Strengths
- Performance in relation to set standards or goals
- Performance in relation to other students
- Effectiveness of instruction

- Effectiveness of programs using combined results of multiple students to measure school, district, and/or state efficacy
- Determining what supports a student may qualify for, such as special education services, English learner (EL) services, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), etc.

## Why is Assessment Important?

Assessments are a team effort between professionals, the student, parents, and families. The goal of any assessment is to provide specific information to guide instructional planning for the student.

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# Part 2: Purposes of Special Education Assessments

## Initial assessments for a student suspected of having a disability

If a student is suspected of having a disability, the school district or family may request an initial evaluation/assessment. This initial assessment's goal is to attain information about the student's abilities. The results are used to determine eligibility for special education and if eligible, what services should be provided. They are used as the baselines from which future assessments should be evaluated.



They also help families and professionals determine educational, behavioral, or social goals that are appropriate for the student. An initial assessment may require multiple testing meetings with professionals so that they may fully understand the student's abilities and ensure informed, appropriate, relevant, and accurate results.

## Assessments for Special Education re-evaluation

Students are continuously learning and growing thus, assessment is a continuous process. The assessment process is a snapshot of a student at a given time along their learning path. Subsequent assessments are used to evaluate and determine the need for ongoing supports.

## Assessments for progress monitoring

Along with the initial and re-evaluation assessments, other types of assessments may be scheduled on a regular basis for progress monitoring. Designed to measure specific skills or behaviors, progress monitoring measures are typically less formal than initial or reevaluation assessments. They focus on determining the level of growth a student has made towards an established goal.



# Part 3:

## Assessments Required for Pre-K Through Grade 3

In pre-k, students learn how letters and language work. They learn best through hands-on play and experiences. Everyday experiences help students understand the connection between letters and sounds, how letters make words, and how words create sentences. It is important for pre-k children to be exposed to as many words and meanings as possible. Children build literacy skills through conversations, having books read to them, picture reading, singing songs, and reciting nursery rhymes. Parents and families can help their student become a strong reader by developing strong reader habits and practicing the skills below. It is never too early to start. There are even activities for infants and toddlers. Below are some familiar terms to know.

- **Print concept** is the understanding that printed letters and words carry meaning. This helps students understand how books and print work. Students need to understand that words make up written and spoken communication.
- **Working with sounds:** Phonological awareness prepares students' ears for working with words and sounds. It includes identifying and making oral rhymes, clapping out the number of syllables in a word, and recognizing words with the same initial sounds, like mom and make.
- **Vocabulary** is a student's knowledge of memory for word meanings. A strong vocabulary improves all areas of communication—listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- **Listening comprehension** is the ability to understand and critically think about a text. It is the purpose of skilled reading. Listening comprehension must come before reading comprehension, so it is an important skill to develop. Listening comprehension isn't just hearing what is said—it is the ability to understand what is spoken or read and relate to that information in some way.

- **Language and communication skills** are important in the early years. During the first years of life, a baby's brain is developing rapidly and laying the foundation for learning. Research shows that reading to young children is the single most important thing adults can do to ensure timely development of language and literacy skills. This is the best time to provide infants and toddlers with loving interactions that can support their cognitive development. Through talking, reading books, and playful interactions, babies begin to feel safe and secure. [Source: Strong Readers Strong Leaders Mississippi - Birth through pre-k strongreaders.com/pre-k/](https://www.strongreaders.com/pre-k/)

- **Public School Pre-K**

**Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children**, The Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children are organized according to the following areas:

- ♦ English Language Arts (ELA)
- ♦ Mathematics
- ♦ Approaches to Learning
- ♦ Social and Emotional Development
- ♦ Science
- ♦ Physical Development
- ♦ Social Studies
- ♦ Creative Expression

The ELA and Mathematics Standards were developed to align with research-based best practices and the Mississippi College-and Career-Readiness Standards. The Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Science, Physical Development, Social Studies, and Creative Expression Standards were developed based on National Standards for Early Childhood Education.

For public pre-k programs that serve four-year-old children, students are required to assess with the Mississippi Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (MKAS) and Brigance.



- **Kindergarten readiness assessment (MKAS<sup>2</sup>):** All four-year old pre-k students are required to take the MKAS<sup>2</sup> except those who have been determined exempt by their IEP committee. The MKAS<sup>2</sup> is given in the fall and the spring. The MKAS<sup>2</sup> measures what children know and should be able to do upon entering school. The MKAS<sup>2</sup> results should be used to establish a baseline by which academic performance may be measured.
- **Brigance Screener III:** All four-year-old children as of September 1, including students with disabilities, are screened. The screener will be administered twice per year in the fall and spring. The screener measures developmental growth throughout the year as it is administered in person by October 1 and in May before school ends. The screener helps identify areas for teachers to provide targeted interventions. Students whose tests show areas of trouble on the developmental screener are provided with targeted interventions to remediate the deficiency. Teachers assess students' progress on an ongoing basis to determine growth over time.
- **Child outcomes summary (COS) process:** Preschool students with disabilities participate in the COS process for SPP/APR Indicator 7, which includes an anchor assessment from a State Board of Education-approved list. This assessment is given when preschool students begin receiving services and again just before their sixth birthday. This is a separate process from evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services. Those assessments are chosen at the discretion of the district. The current list of assessments for COS can be found in the [State Board of Education Approved Anchor Assessment List for Child Outcomes Summary \(COS\) Process](#).
- **Assessments Required for Public K-3**
  - ♦ **Literacy-Based Universal Screener and Diagnostic Assessment:** Mississippi Code § 37-23-16 and Mississippi Code § 37-177-5

require the Mississippi Department of Education to administer universal screening assessments to all students at least three times during the year to provide an especially critical "first look" at individual students. The Mississippi Department of Education selects early literacy and numeracy screening assessment instrument(s) to be used throughout the state in the screening of students in kindergarten through Grade 3. The Mississippi Department of Education, in collaboration with Mississippi Reading Panel, has established an approved list of reading screeners to be used by local school districts in Grades K-3. Universal screeners are given to kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade students three (3) times a year: beginning, middle, and end.

- ♦ If a student "flags" or needs additional supports as determined by the universal screener, a diagnostic assessment should be administered to the student. Diagnostic assessments provide in-depth information about individual students' particular strengths and needs for Tier 2 supplemental instruction or Tier 3 intensive intervention."
- ♦ **Kindergarten readiness assessment (MKAS<sup>2</sup>):** The MKAS<sup>2</sup> is taken at the beginning of a student's kindergarten school year and then at the end of the year to measure the growth of what the student knew upon entering school and what is learned throughout the year. The primary purpose of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is to improve the quality of classroom instruction and other services provided to students. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment results should be used to establish a baseline in which academic performance may be measured. Utilizing the results aids districts, schools, and teachers in developing growth goals for students based on their individual needs..





# Part 4:

## Mississippi's Academic Assessment (Grades 3-12)

### Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP)

is designed to measure student achievement in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, Science, and US History.

MAAP is aligned to the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards (MS CCRS).

Students are assessed in grades 3 through 8 with MAAP for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics.

Students are assessed in grades 5 and 8 with MAAP for Science.

Students are assessed in high school with MAAP End of Course Assessments for:

- ♦ Algebra I
- ♦ Biology I
- ♦ English II
- ♦ U.S. History

### Mississippi Academic Assessment Program-Alternate (MAAP-A)

is designed to measure student achievement in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science for students with significant cognitive disability (SCD).

MAAP-A is aligned to the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (MS AAAS).

Students are assessed in grades 3 through 8 with MAAP-A for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics.

Students are assessed in grades 5 and 8 with MAAP-A for Science.

Students are assessed in high school with MAAP-A End-of-Course Assessments for:

- ♦ Alternate Algebra I
- ♦ Alternate Biology I
- ♦ Alternate English II





# Part 5: Other Assessments

## 11th Grade American College Testing (ACT) Assessment

The ACT assessment is a curriculum- and standards-based educational planning tool that assesses students' academic readiness for college. The ACT is administered to all students classified as 11th grade students during the academic year, but it can be taken at other times. Ungraded students whose birthdays link them to the cohort of students identified as 11th grade students are also included, but there is an exemption available. For more information, visit [ACT State Testing](#).

## English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) and DRC LAS

*(This assessment is for any student who meets the criteria to be an English learner.)*

When parents and families register their student in the public school system, a Home Language Survey is completed. This survey is used to determine if the student understands the English language. Students familiar with a language other than English are then assessed to check their English language skills using the state's screener for English language proficiency. If the test shows the student is not yet

English proficient, the student is classified as an English learner. For more information, see [Supports for Parents & Guardians of English Learners](#).

Yearly, EL students are administered the Data Recognition Corporation Links Assessment System (DRC LAS), a secure, large-scale, English language proficiency test administered to K-12 students who have been officially identified as English learners (ELs) in the speaking, listening, reading, and writing domains. It assesses students in the speaking, listening, reading and writing domains.

## National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP Testing)

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Assessments are conducted periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, and U.S. History. Also known as The Nation's Report Card, NAEP has provided important information about how students perform academically since 1969, and serves as a comparison of how Mississippi students are performing compared to students around the country.



# Notes:



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# Part 6: Requirements for Graduation

## Requirements for Graduation under the Traditional Diploma

Students completing a Traditional Diploma are required to participate in the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP). Students may also take additional classes to earn an academic, distinguished academic, or career and technical education (CTE) endorsement. Based upon the student's course of study, available Traditional Diplomas include the following:



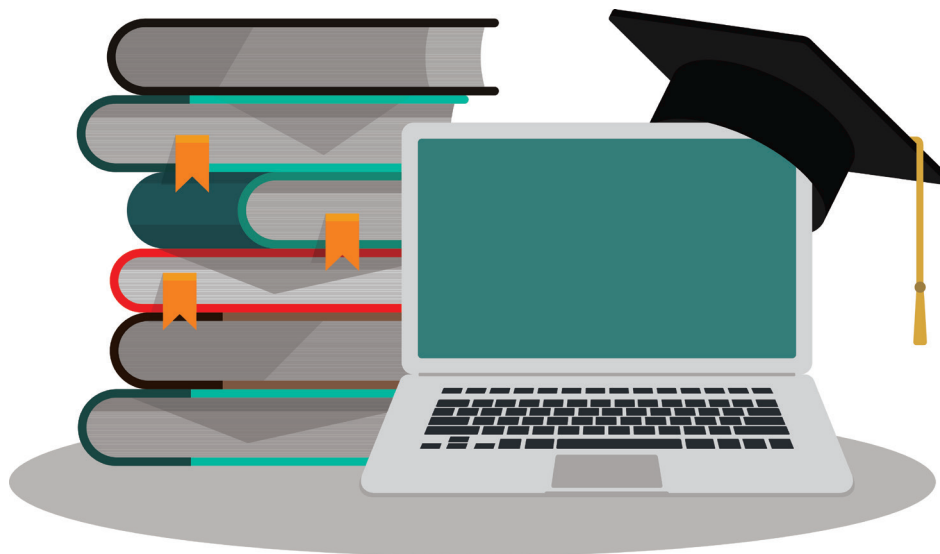
- ♦ Traditional Diploma
- ♦ Traditional Diploma + CTE Endorsement
- ♦ Traditional Diploma + Academic Endorsement
- ♦ Traditional Diploma + Distinguished Academic Endorsement

For more information about assessments required for students completing a Traditional Diploma, contact the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Student Assessment at 601.359.3052 ([mdek12.org/OSA](http://mdek12.org/OSA)).

## Requirements for Graduation under the Alternate Diploma

Students completing Alternate Diploma Options are required to participate in the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program-Alternate (MAAP-A). Only students identified by their Individualized Education Program committee as having a significant cognitive disability may be eligible to earn the Alternate Diploma. The Alternate Diploma meets accountability graduation requirements in the same manner as a Traditional Diploma. Students earning the Alternate Diploma must contact the postsecondary institution to determine eligibility for Ability to Benefit (ATB).

Any student with a significant cognitive disability who completes the minimum graduation requirements and has achieved a level of Passing or Proficient on the end-of-course MAAP-A assessments is eligible to receive an Alternate Diploma. Students must participate in the alternate assessments during the year the student is enrolled in the corresponding courses (Alternate Biology, Alternate English II, Alternate Algebra). The local school district may establish additional local requirements approved by the local school board as authorized under Miss. Code Ann. § 37-16-7.



## Certificate of Completion

Students with disabilities are eligible for a Certificate of Completion. A Certificate of Completion is not a high school diploma or its equivalent, but rather an acknowledgment of a student's completion of his/her Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students eligible to receive a Certificate of Completion must fall into one of the following categories:



- Students without a significant cognitive disability at the end of eighth grade who:
  - ♦ Are 16 years old or older
  - ♦ At least three or more grade levels below their peers in reading and math
  - ♦ Have a signed statement from the parent that they understand that the Certificate of Completion is not a standard diploma and will not meet the requirements for entry into any career or post-secondary opportunity that requires a diploma
- Students with a significant cognitive disability at the end of eighth grade who:
  - ♦ Have extremely limited or no receptive and expressive communication skills
  - ♦ Have a signed statement from the parent that they understand that the Certificate of Completion is not a standard diploma and will not meet the requirements for entry into any career or college opportunity that requires a diploma
- Students with or without a significant cognitive disability at the end of their third school year of high school (6 semesters) who:
  - ♦ Have not earned a minimum of three English credits, three math credits, two science credits, two social studies credits, and five electives
  - ♦ Have a signed statement from the parent and student that they do not wish for the student to be given services through age 20 and understand that the Certificate of Completion is not a standard diploma and will not meet the requirements for entry into any career or college opportunity that requires a diploma
- ♦ Have evidence of three or more years of intensive intervention to earn Carnegie Unit-bearing courses (or Alternate Diploma Course Credits for students with a significant cognitive disability). Evidence could include, but is not limited to:
  - Progress monitoring data from reading intervention programs or math intervention programs
  - Documentation of accommodations and modifications provided in the general education courses and assessments
  - Course schedules outlining dedicated time for intervention
- The student's IEP committee determines the course of study for the Certificate of Completion. Areas of instruction should be developed based on the needs of the individual student. Coursework could include, as appropriate for the student:
  - ♦ Intensive remediation in deficit area skills
  - ♦ Career preparation courses
  - ♦ Life skills courses
- Students earning the Certificate of Completion must have completed at least four years of high school and/or be at least 19 years of age at the time of graduation.
- Students pursuing a Certificate of Completion are required to participate in the Mississippi statewide assessment program deemed appropriate by their IEP committee.
- Students working toward the Certificate of Completion who meet the criteria for a significant cognitive disability are required to participate in the high school end-of-course alternate assessment during the school year the student is enrolled in the corresponding alternate course (Alternate Biology, Alternate English II, Alternate Algebra).
- Students working toward the Certificate of Completion who do not meet the criteria for a significant cognitive disability are required to participate in the regular high school end-of-course subject area test(s) during the school year the student is enrolled in the corresponding course(s).

# Part 7: Glossary

■ **Academic assessment** is the process of using evidence to understand and improve student learning in academic programs. Most importantly, academic assessment provides teachers with information about gaps in student learning that may be used to tailor efforts for improvement.

- **Criterion-referenced assessments** are designed to measure student performance against a fixed set of predetermined criteria or learning standards (i.e., concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education). In elementary and secondary education, criterion-referenced tests are used to evaluate whether students have learned a specific body of knowledge or acquired a specific skill set. For example, the curriculum taught in a course, academic program, or content area.
- **Formative assessment** refers to a wide variety of methods that teachers use to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs, and academic progress during a lesson, unit, or course. Formative assessments help teachers identify concepts that students are struggling to understand, skills they are having difficulty acquiring, or learning standards they have not yet achieved so that adjustments can be made to lessons, instructional techniques, and academic support.
- **Norm-referenced assessments** are designed to compare and rank test takers in relation to one another. Norm-referenced tests report whether test takers performed better or worse than a hypothetical average student, which is determined by comparing scores against the performance results of a statistically selected group of test takers, typically of the same age or grade level, who have already taken the exam.

- **Performance-based assessment** is one alternative to traditional methods of testing student achievement which requires students to demonstrate knowledge and skills, including the process they use to solve problems. Performance assessments are appropriate for determining whether students are achieving the higher standards set by states for all students.
- **Summative assessments** are used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period—typically at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year.
- **Universal Screening Assessments** are administered to all students at least three times during the year to provide an especially critical “first look” at individual students. The Mississippi Department of Education, in collaboration with the Mississippi Reading Panel, has established an approved list of reading screeners to be used by local school districts in Grades K-3.
  - ♦ **FAST:** Adaptive Reading, CBMreading, and earlyReading English (administered together as a suite of three assessments): Grades K-12
  - ♦ **i-Ready:** Grades K-12
  - ♦ **Istation Indicators of Progress (ISIP):** Grades K-5
  - ♦ **mCLASS Reading 3D:** Grades K-3
  - ♦ **Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Growth:** Grades K-2, MAP: Grades 2-10
  - ♦ **STAR Early Literacy:** Grades PreK-3, STAR Reading: Grades 1-12



- **ACT state testing:** The ACT assessment is a curriculum- and standards-based educational planning tool that assesses students' academic readiness for college. The ACT is administered to all students classified as 11th grade students during the academic year. Ungraded students whose birthdays link them to the cohort of students identified as 11th grade students are also included.
- **Adaptive behavior assessments** are often used in evaluations of students with learning disabilities. These assessments can help determine which behavioral strengths and weaknesses need to be addressed to improve a student's chances of success in both school and life.
- **Cognitive assessment** is an examination conducted to determine someone's level of cognitive function. There are several reasons to perform this exam, such as a student having difficulty following instructions or struggling to remember things or process information. Education professionals may administer a cognitive assessment to determine if a child has a cognitive impairment.
- **Diagnostic assessments** should be administered to students who fail the screening assessment. Diagnostic assessments provide in-depth information about individual students' strengths and needs for Tier 2 supplemental instruction and/or Tier 3 intensive intervention.
- **English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT):** The Data Recognition Corporation Links Assessment System (DRC LAS) is a secure, large-scale, English language proficiency assessment administered to students in Grades K-12 who have been officially identified as English learners (ELs). This assessment is administered annually to monitor ELs' progress in acquiring academic English. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires that the Local Education Agency (LEA) must assess all ELs using the annual English language proficiency assessment, including those students whose parents have declined to enroll them in, or had them removed from, Language Instruction Education Programs (LIEPs).
- **Formative assessment** is a process used by classroom teachers and students on a regular basis to confirm, adjust, and support teaching and learning.
- **Functional behavioral assessment (FBA)** describes the process of determining why a student engages in behaviors that impede learning and how the student's behavior relates to the environment. Functional performance is defined as skills or activities that are not considered academic or related to the student's academic achievement but are considered necessary routine activities, such as daily living skills, social skills, behavior skills, mobility skills, etc.
- **Interim or benchmark assessments** are given to students multiple times throughout the school year to monitor student learning toward meeting learning goals over time.
- **Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP)** is designed to measure student achievement in Grades 3-8 in English language arts and math. Additionally, science is assessed in Grades 5 and 8, and U.S. History is assessed in high school. High school students take end-of-course exams in Algebra I, English II, Biology, and U.S. History. The ACT college entrance exam is also given to all juniors. Each assessment evaluates student learning to ensure students develop the knowledge and skills they need to graduate from high school prepared for college or career.
- **Mississippi Academic Assessment Program-Alternate (MAAP-A)** is the statewide assessment created to ensure compliance under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA). The MAAP-A assessment is aligned with the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (MS AAAS) for English language arts, mathematics, and science and measures the academic skills of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet the requirements to take the MAAP-A. Qualifications must be documented on students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).









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